

WAYNE VICKREY

I joined the Navy in 1938 and went to boot camp in Norfolk, Virginia. After boot camp I was assigned to the USS Oklahoma for duty. That was in 1939 when the fleet was moved from The West Coast to Hawaii. I had celebrated my 21st birthday the night before and was on board that morning. I was on the third deck painting lockers, when I felt the first explosion. I heard at least three explosions, and then someone came over the ship's announcing system and yelled, "This is a real air raid- no shit!" I quickly navigated the many passageways and ladders trying to make my way out. On my way I passed a group of sailors who had stopped to pray. I could not believe what I was seeing. I attempted to snap them out of their apparent shock by yelling, "Pray later, get your asses off the boat!" As I tried to run up the ladder to the main deck the shock of a torpedo-hit and the rolling over of the ship knocked the ladder out from under me, someone passed me a line and I was able to climb up and out to the main deck. By this time the vessel had already started to roll heavily to port. Once on deck, I noticed that some of the sailors had started to dive off the vessel and into the water, but they were jumping off on the wrong side! They were jumping to port and the ship was sinking on top of them. All this time I can hear the explosions and the bombs falling. That is when I saw the bombs fall on the USS Arizona. I sat there on the side of my ship and watched the Arizona explode.

The Oklahoma was rolling over so quickly that the lines that kept us moored to the *Maryland* had started to snap. Turning to the starboard side of the vessel, I quickly sat down and watched sailors jump into the water. Because the water was already heavily coated with oil and debris, they could not see where they were diving and they were hitting their heads on the hull of the ship as they dove in. I yelled to everyone, "Stop diving in head first, sit on your butt and slide down the hull!". At that time I did just that and swam away from the ship. After swimming and treading water for what seemed like an eternity, a rescue boat came by and picked me up.

The rescue boat continued to go around the vessels trying to get as many sailors out of the water as possible. Everyone was covered in oil and in a panic. At that time little was known about CPR and mouth to mouth resuscitation. Common sense told us to press on their chest in an attempt to get the water out of their lungs and get them to breathe. Some we were able to save and some we could not. The rescue boat finally dropped us off at the beach and I quickly ran to the nearest barracks to find clean, dry clothing. In the barracks I ran to the lockers and started breaking them open until I found clothes that would fit. That is when I realized that I was in the Officer's Quarters.

After the attack, everyone worked diligently to get the base back in operation, the ships repaired and ready to fight. I watched as the divers went down on the Oklahoma and their efforts to raise her. I lost everything that was on the ship that day. Including the re-enlistment bonus I had received for shipping over the month before (Vickrey),